

Saudi Arabia's Society and Government

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SUMMARY OF QUALIFICATIONS AND EXPERIENCE

I am a visiting fellow at Brown University's Watson Institute for International and Public Affairs, a former U.S. assistant secretary of defense, ambassador to Saudi Arabia (during operations Desert Shield and Desert Storm), acting assistant secretary of state for African Affairs, chargé d'affaires at both Bangkok and Beijing, country director for Chinese and Mongolian affairs, acting U.S. coordinator for refugee affairs, and director of program development and management at the U.S. Information Agency. A copy of my CV is attached as Exhibit A.

I have been asked by the World Assembly of Muslim Youth (WAMY) to provide expert testimony concerning the history, politics, and culture of Saudi Arabia, including Wahhabism; world conflicts and their relationship to 9/11; the relationship between the Kingdom of Saudi Arabia and WAMY, as well as the relationship between the Kingdom, Osama bin Laden,¹ and al Qaeda. Part II of this report addresses certain opinions offered by plaintiffs' experts.

I rely primarily on my personal and professional experience, but have cited corroborative material in footnotes, and provide a short reading list as Exhibit B.

INTRODUCTION

The World Assembly of Muslim Youth (WAMY) and its activities cannot be understood outside the context of Saudi history and the circumstances of the first Kingdom of Saudi Arabia's founding in 1744. Relevant factors include:

- The union of political and theological power upon which the Kingdom was founded and upon which the ruling family and government continue to base their legitimacy.

¹ A brief but relevant biography of Osama bin Laden is at <https://u-s-history.com/pages/h2062.html>. A much fuller account is included in *Ghost Wars: The Secret History of the CIA, Afghanistan, and bin Laden from the Soviet Invasion to September 10, 2001* by Steve Coll, Penguin Press, 2004, which won the 2005 Pulitzer Award for general non-fiction. Coll's subsequent portrait of the Bin Laden family goes into yet more detail: *The Bin Ladens: An Arabian Family in the American Century*, Penguin Press, 2008.

- The periodic eruption of extremist opposition to that legitimacy and the eventual emergence of the quietist traditions of Saudi Arabia's 20th century "Wahhabi" establishment Islam.
- The monarchy's reliance on so-called "Wahhabism" as a defense against assaults on its legitimacy by Salafist and other Islamist critics.
- The existential threat to Saudi Arabia of secular pan-Arab nationalism and the Saudi adoption of an Islamic identity as a counter to this.
- The influences on the Kingdom's inhabitants of Egypt's Muslim Brotherhood and related Salafi extremist movements.

These factors make WAMY the determined antagonist of Osama bin Laden, al Qaeda, the "Islamic State," and similar Islamist organizations and individuals. WAMY is an integral part of the Kingdom of Saudi Arabia's defenses against violent extremism and terrorism, not an ally of them.

THE KINGDOM OF SAUD ARABIA: BACKGROUND

Saudi Arabia is unique among the world's non-Western countries in never having experienced Western colonialism, military invasion, or missionary activity. The Kingdom's system of governance has evolved from tribal traditions recognized by anthropologists but foreign to political science. Saudi Arabia has modernized its government by importing Western bureaucratic structures and institutions at its own expense and modifying them to suit Islamic mores. But it has not adopted a form of government familiar to either Aristotle or the contemporary West.

To explain the Saudi system to Westerners unfamiliar with Arabia and its traditions, journalists and academics have described it as an "absolute monarchy."² This is a convenient narrative but profoundly misleading. Since its rise to power almost three centuries ago, the Saudi royal family's legitimacy has rested on its affirmation of the strict Islamic norms of an 18th century theological reformer, Mohammed ibn `Abd al-Wahhab, as interpreted by his descendants and other Muslim scholars, on its insistence on verifying a consensus of stakeholders in its society

² This description, widespread in the West, is epitomized in the crowd-edited Wikipedia entry at https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Politics_of_Saudi_Arabia

through consultations [*shura* - الشورى] before making decisions, and on its generous charitable donations to the less fortunate members of its own society and the *umma* (the broad community of believers in Islam).³

Today's Kingdom of Saudi Arabia is the third Saudi state. The first, founded in 1744, was based on a pact that united the theological authority of Mohammed ibn `Abd al-Wahhab with the secular power of the leader of the Emirate of Diriyah, Mohammed ibn Sa`ud. This alliance of religious belief with the arts of rulership was then cemented by intermarriage between the families of its two founders. It has persisted to this day, surviving the armed overthrow by Egypt of the first Saudi state in 1818 and the Ottoman-manipulated collapse of the second state in 1891.

The current Kingdom of Saudi Arabia was conceived in 1902, when its founder, `Abd al-Aziz ibn `Abd al-Rahman ibn Faisal, ibn Turki ibn Mohammed Al-Sa`ud (known to his own people as "Abd al-Aziz Al Sa`ud" and in the West as "Ibn Saud") returned from exile in Kuwait to reconquer his family's ancestral seat of power, Riyadh. By 1912, Ibn Saud controlled both Central and Eastern Arabia. With the approval of the leading followers of his family's Wahhabi religious sect and that of the broader and more reactionary Salafi tradition prevalent in the Arabian north, he founded a militant society of Salafist Bedouin warriors called the *Ikhwan* (Brotherhood).

The *Ikhwan*'s combination of religious intensity with military ferocity enabled Ibn Saud to conquer most of the Arabian Peninsula, including the two holy cities of Mecca and Medina. He then found himself accused of religious laxity by the *Ikhwan*, who professed an aggressively reactionary form of Salafism. Ibn Sa`ud was left with no alternative but to combat the *Ikhwan* with some quiet support from the British. After five years of warfare, in 1929, he succeeded in crushing the rebellion, killing or jailing the *Ikhwan*'s most zealous leaders and incorporating those of their followers willing to pledge allegiance to him into his newly formed *Haras al Watani* (National Guard).⁴ This ensured that Saudi "Wahhabism was forcefully

³ For a general description of governance in Saudi Arabia, see the Encyclopedia Britannica, <https://www.britannica.com/place/Saudi-Arabia/Government-and-society#ref45216>. Article 8 of the Basic Law (the closest thing to a constitution that the Kingdom has, declares that: "Governance in the Kingdom of Saudi Arabia shall be based on justice, shura (consultation), and equality in accordance with the Islamic Shari'ah." (Emphasis added.)

⁴ <https://www.globalsecurity.org/military/world/gulf/sang.htm> The mission of the National Guard is to protect the Al Sa`ud from domestic rebellion, insurgency, or military coup d'état. Since 1973, reflecting the close alliance

changed from a movement of revolution⁵ . . . to a movement of conservative social, political, theological, and religious da'wa (Islamic call) . . . that upholds loyalty to the royal Saudi family and the King's absolute power.”⁶

In 1932, Ibn Saud proclaimed a unified state with its capital in Riyadh. A brief war with Yemen culminated in the 1934 Treaty of Ta'if, which confirmed the accession of what are now the Kingdom of Saudi Arabia's southwestern provinces of `Asir, Baha, Jizan, and Najran to the new state. Almost all the Saudi 9/11 hijackers came from this southwestern frontier region.⁷ ⁱ Its inhabitants had traditionally espoused varieties of Shi`ism typical of Yemen, rather than the Wahhabi doctrines prevalent in the Kingdom's core. But beginning in the 1950s, thousands of teachers associated with Egypt's Sunni Muslim Brotherhood, who faced persecution at home from President Gamal Abdel Nasser's secular military dictatorship, found refuge as teachers in oil-rich Saudi Arabia's newly established public schools. This galvanized a religious shift toward the Egyptian version of Salafism in the Kingdom's southwestern provinces.⁸

Some adherents of Egypt's Muslim Brotherhood passionately identified with the Palestinian struggle against Israeli occupation, annexation, and ethnic cleansing and embraced heterodox concepts of militant *jihad* to defend against occupation of Palestine and the confiscating of land by the Israelis and expelling Palestinians.

THE KINGDOM OF SAUDI ARABIA AND “WAHHABISM”

The Wahhabi establishment, which dominates the Saudi *`ulama* (the assembly of scholars who are the authoritative interpreters of religious dogma in the Kingdom) is a pillar of Al Sa`ud legitimacy. Still, Salafi extremists distinct from those professing “Wahhabism”⁹ have

between the royal family and the United States government, the Guard's principal trainer and adviser has been the U.S. Army.

⁶ Alastair Crooke, “*You Can't Understand ISIS If You Don't Know the History of Wahhabism in Saudi Arabia*,” https://www.huffpost.com/entry/isis-wahhabism-saudi-arabia_b_5717157

⁷ See endnote i, from a former U.S. intelligence officer who wishes to remain anonymous, which describes the well-known origins of the Saudi hijackers and their region in detail. I attest to its accuracy.

⁸ The role of Egyptian Muslim Brotherhood teachers in indoctrinating Saudi students is notorious. See, for example, <https://www.washingtonpost.com/news/monkey-cage/wp/2014/03/20/saudi-arabias-muslim-brotherhood-predicament/>

⁹ The followers of Mohammed Abd al-Wahhab do not call themselves Wahhabis. This is a derogatory term coined by their Muslim and non-Muslim critics. They refer to themselves simply as “the Muslims,” with the implication being that other Muslims who do not subscribe to their views are nonbelievers. A more neutral term, *muwahideen* or unitarian, is sometimes used because of Abd al-Wahhab's extreme monotheism. ... At times they are referred to

periodically taken up arms against the Saudi state, most notably in their 1920s rebellion and their November 1979 seizure of the great mosque of Mecca (the Masjid al Haram).¹⁰ Al Qaeda is a familiar manifestation of this antimonarchical and fanatic strain of heretical Islam. In no sense is it compatible with the “Wahhabism”¹¹ that is the official version of Islam in the Kingdom.

Official Saudi Arabian “Wahhabism”¹² derives from the concern of its original propounder, Mohammed ibn `Abd al-Wahhab, that the religious practices he observed in 18th century Arabia were no longer true to the revelations and precepts originally memorialized in the Quran and the lessons of the Prophet Mohammed’s life and sayings (the *Sunna*). To correct this weakening of Islam as a faith, he believed, Muslims must read and directly follow the admonitions of the Quran, while referring to the practices of the *Salaf* – the first three generations of Muslims – for guidance. Intriguingly, Wahhabism thus echoes Lutheranism and other early Protestant movements in their insistence on the validation of Christian practices by both the Bible and those of the earliest Christian communities. “Wahhabism” is a distinctive form of Salafism, as Lutheranism is a singular version of Protestantism or Modern Orthodox Judaism is a tradition-affirming but less exacting example of Orthodox Judaism.

Originally restricted to the northern Arabian Peninsula, the spread of “Wahhabism” to other regions of the Arab and Islamic worlds was the result of the assault on them of European colonialism.¹³ On 1 July 1798, Napoleon invaded Egypt. By October, his affronts to Islamic beliefs and customs had led to a violent rebellion in Cairo by the Muslim faithful against the French occupation. He brutally suppressed their resistance.

Many Muslims in Egypt and other parts of the Middle East subjected to European conquest attributed their humiliation to an abandonment by God caused by their failure to follow Islam as

as Salafis because, like several other Islamic movements, they seek to follow the practices of the early Muslims known as the Salaf. Rundell, op. cit. p. 96.

¹⁰ For a discussion of the differences between Wahhabism and Salafism, including the evolution of Salafis jihadism, see “Salafi Jihadism – An Ideological Misnomer”: <https://smallwarsjournal.com/jrnl/art/salafi-jihadism-an-ideological-misnomer>

¹¹ The Saudi “Council of Senior Scholars” or `Ulema has repeatedly condemned al Qaeda as “heretics.” See, for example, https://www.realclearpolitics.com/articles/2010/06/13/saudi_fatwa_puts_terrorists_on_notice_105947.html.

¹² For a general description of “Wahhabism,” see the Encyclopedia Britannica entry for “Wahhabi” -- <https://www.britannica.com/topic/Wahhabi>. See also *Salafis and Wahhabis: Two Sides of the Same Coin?* <https://www.rsis.edu.sg/rsis-publication/rsis/co16254-salafis-and-wahhabis-two-sides-of-the-same-coin/>.

¹³ See footnote 2, above.

originally proclaimed. As they mobilized to resist Western military power and cultural evangelism, they found Mohammed ibn `Abd al-Wahhab's critique of Islam's alleged deviations from the "straight path" both inspiring and galvanizing.

THE ANTAGONISM BETWEEN AL QAEDA AND THE KSA/WAHHABISM

Al Qaeda certainly fits this misleading stereotype. It has been labeled by other Muslims and many in the West as "Wahhabi."¹⁴ But it has dedicated itself to the overthrow of the existing "Wahhabi" order in the Kingdom, rather than embracing the cause of those falsely labeled "Wabbabis" beyond Saudi Arabia's borders. Al Qaeda's stated aim is regime change to enable it to control the pulpits in Mecca, Medina, and Jerusalem to which the world's nearly two billion Muslims look for spiritual guidance. Al Qaeda has consistently condemned the Al Sa`ud and the "Wahhabi" `ulama as religiously apostate. It has justified its attacks on the United States and other Western targets as necessitated by U.S. and Western support for both Zionism and for what it regards as the illegitimate rule of the Al Sa`ud over the Islamic holy places in Arabia. Al Qaeda says it has attacked the "far enemy" of the United States to force an end to American and other Western support for its targets, which are none other than ending the "Wahhabi" Kingdom of Saudi Arabia's control of Mecca and Medina and the Israeli occupation of Jerusalem.¹⁵

¹⁴ For example, in South Asia, "the Deobandis are referred to as 'Wahhabis' by their opponents – the Barelvis and the Shias. In reality, they are not Wahhabis, even though they share many of their beliefs. The true Wahhabis among Indian Muslims are said to be fewer than 5 percent." <https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Deobandi> See also <https://www.nytimes.com/2016/10/20/opinion/dont-blame-wahhabism-for-terrorism.html> See comments by Karen Armstrong at <https://www.scribd.com/document/4054381/The-Wahhabi-Myth-Salafism-Wahhabism-Qutbism> "Bin Laden was not inspired by Wahhabism but by the writings of the Egyptian ideologue Sayyid Qutb, who was executed by President Nasser in 1966. Almost every fundamentalist movement in Sunni Islam has been strongly influenced by Qutb, so there is a good case for calling the violence that some of his followers commit "Qutbian terrorism." Qutb urged his followers to withdraw from the moral and spiritual barbarism of modern society and fight it to the death. Western people should learn more about such thinkers as Qutb and become aware of the many dramatically different shades of opinion in the Muslim world. There are too many lazy, unexamined assumptions about Islam."

¹⁵ See *Saudi Arabia: Al Qaeda's Strategic Goals*, Stratfor, <https://worldview.stratfor.com/article/saudi-arabia-al-qaedas-strategic-goals>, which documents al Qaeda's short-term goals as "Undercutting the House of Saud. Severing the link between the United States and the House of Saud. Undermining the House of Saud's political authority. Destroying the royal family's religious credentials." The fatwa issued by Osama bin Laden on August 23, 1996, *Expel the Polytheists from the Arabian Peninsula*, declares the Al Sa`ud to be illegitimate for "ignoring the divine Shari'ah law; depriving people of their legitimate rights; allowing the American to occupy the land of the two Holy Places; imprisonment, unjustly, of the sincere scholars." The full text can be accessed at https://is.muni.cz/el/1423/jaro2010/MVZ448/OBL_AQ_Fatwa_1996.pdf. Also see *Jihad against Jews and Crusaders*, issued February 23, 1998 by Osama bin Laden, Ayman Zawahari, et al., which states this objective: "to kill the Americans and their allies -- civilians and military -- is an individual duty for every Muslim who can do it in

As al Qaeda leadership is all too aware, notwithstanding self-serving foreign misuses of the term “Wahhabi” to caricature militant Salafis, Saudi Wahhabis advocate quietism and obedience to government authority.¹⁶ As the history of “Wahhabism” in Saudi Arabia attests, it long ago became a pillar of support for the Kingdom’s Al Sa`ud rulers and the social order they administer. The Saudi *ulama*, which speaks for Saudi “Wahhabism” with the support of the royal family, has been unequivocal in its condemnation of Al Qaeda, its ideology, and its practices, which it considers perversions of pertinent Islamic principles.¹⁷

The religious campaigns by the Saudi Wahhabis began as Saudi Arabia itself began to experience Islamist terrorism, well before the 9/11 terrorist attacks on the United States. For example, Sheikh `Abd al-Aziz ibn Baaz (known as “Bin Baaz”), the Grand Mufti (or officially supreme religious mentor) of Saudi Arabia from 1993 until his death in 1999, declared that it was forbidden for “anyone to cooperate with [Osama bin Laden and others like him] in their evil,” and demanded that right-thinking Muslims “destroy and annihilate those publications that have emanated from ... the callers of falsehood (bin Laden and those like him) and not be lenient

any country in which it is possible to do it, in order to liberate the al-Aqsa Mosque and the holy mosque [Mecca] from their grip, and in order for their armies to move out of all the lands of Islam, defeated and unable to threaten any Muslim.” <https://fas.org/irp/world/para/docs/980223-fatwa.htm>

¹⁶ “The agreement between Ibn Abd al-Wahhab and Muhammad ibn Saud of 1744 became a “mutual support pact” and power-sharing arrangement between the Al Saud and the Al ash-Sheikh, which has remained in place for nearly 300 years. The pact between the two families, which continues to this day, is based on the Al Saud maintaining the Al ash-Sheikh’s authority in religious matters and upholding and propagating the Wahhabi doctrine. In return, the Al ash-Sheikh support the Al Saud’s political authority thereby using its religious-moral authority to legitimize the royal family’s rule. In fact, each legitimizes the other. This alliance formed in the 18th century provided the ideological impetus to Saudi expansion and remains the basis of Saudi Arabian dynastic rule today.”

https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Al_ash-Sheikh.

See *Wahhabi Doctrine and its Development*, <https://www.oasiscenter.eu/en/wahhabism-and-its-development>

“Wahhabi clerics made obedience to the ruler a religious duty. This is in accord with the Sunni Muslim tradition that believers must obey a ruler who upholds Islam as long as a ruler does not command believers to violate Islamic law.”

Rundell, op. cit., p. 95, “Abd al-Wahhab taught that a true Muslim must swear and abide by a religious oath of allegiance to an established Muslim ruler if he is to expect salvation on the Day of Judgment. Breaking this oath or bay’ah constituted a serious sin. This concept is enshrined in Saudi Arabia’s Basic Law of Governance which states: “The citizens shall pledge allegiance to the King and obedience in times of hardship and ease, fortune and adversity.” Moreover, Abd al-Wahhab believed that giving advice to a Muslim ruler should be done privately, and only by senior community leaders. He forcefully discouraged public demonstrations as they could lead to civil disorder. He essentially instructed true believers to submit to the will of their rulers, respect their judgment and accept their policy choices without protest.”

¹⁷ See, e.g., *For Council of Supreme Scholars, terrorism violates Islamic law*, <http://www.asianews.it/news-en/For-Council-of-Supreme-Scholars,-terrorism-violates-Islamic-law-18141.html> See also *Saudi top cleric blasts Qaeda, IS as ‘enemy No 1’ of Islam*, <https://www.arabianbusiness.com/saudi-mufti-tells-young-saudis-not-heed-call-jihad-562908.html>. See also *Muslim leaders’ statements condemning terrorism, from 9/11 to ISIS/Islamic State atrocities in 2014*. <http://www.religioustolerance.org/muslim-leaders-condemn-acts-of-terrorism.htm>

with them.¹⁸ He proclaimed that “a suicide bomber shall be punished in Hell.” Bin Baaz was far from alone in the Wahhabi `ulama when he took this position. Sheikh Mohammed ibn al-Uthaymeen,¹⁹ one of the most famously extremist members of the Saudi `ulama, said of suicide bombers that they “have wrongfully committed suicide, and that this necessitates entry into Hell-Fire, and ... that [such a] person is not a martyr (*shaheed*) [entitled to take refuge in Allah].²⁰”

Suicide bombings (“martyrdom operations”)²¹ have precedents in Japan’s resort to *kamikazes* to oppose the American invasion of their homeland, the Viet Minh’s widespread use of them to expel French colonialism after World War II, and the ferocity of the Tamil Tigers’ separatist war in Sri Lanka. None of these societies is Muslim. There is no instance of suicide bombings in Muslim societies prior to the 1981 Franco-American occupation of Beirut and the 1982 Israeli occupation of southern Lebanon, when they were weaponized by Hezbollah, a pro-Iranian Shi`ite organization that is regarded by Saudi Arabia as a mortal enemy. Ten years later, Sunni groups like Palestinian Islamic Jihad and Hamas²² began using suicide bombings to register their opposition to Zionist occupation and settlement of Palestine. Al Qaeda introduced the practice to Saudi Arabia.²³

THE FALLOUT AND OPENLY HOSTILE RELATIONSHIP BETWEEN OSAMA BIN LADEN AND THE KINGDOM OF SAUDI ARABIA

On August 2, 1990, Saddam Hussein’s Iraq invaded and began the annexation of Kuwait.²⁴ On August 6, Saudi King Fahd bin `Abd al-Aziz approved the deployment of 220,000 U.S. troops to help defend the Kingdom against a projected Iraqi invasion. This decision aroused passionate objections from certain factions in Saudi Arabia, especially those who had served in Afghanistan

¹⁸ Quoted in <https://scribd.com/scholars-against-bin-laden>

¹⁹ Abu 'Abd Allah Muhammad ibn Saalih ibn Muhammad ibn Sulayman ibn Abd Al Rahman Al Uthaymeen Al Tamimi (born March 9, 1925, died January 10, 2001).

²⁰ Cited at <http://www.spubs.com/sps/sp.cfm?subsecID=MNJ14&articleID=MNJ140003&articlePages=1>

²¹ See <https://www.britannica.com/topic/suicide-bombing>

²² Hamas (an acronym of حركة المقاومة الإسلامية *Harakat al-Muqāwamah al-`Islāmiyyah* [Islamic Resistance Movement]) is a Palestinian offshoot of the Egyptian Muslim Brotherhood that Israel’s intelligence agencies initially sponsored as a religious firebreak against the secular leadership of the Palestinian Liberation Organization or PLO. It is democratic and opposed to dictatorship, military rule, or monarchy in the Arab world.

²³ According to the *Economist*, by 2008, al Qaeda had carried out some 30 attacks in Saudi Arabia, costing the lives of 90 civilians and 74 policemen. <https://www.economist-com.libproxy.ncl.ac.uk/middle-east-and-africa/2008/10/23/the-struggle-against-al-qaeda>

²⁴ The circumstances that led up the Gulf War of 1990 – 1991 and its course as seen by me as the U.S. ambassador in Riyadh are described in *From the Eye of the Storm: The Kuwait Crisis as Seen from the American Embassy at Riyadh*, Chapter 1 of *America’s Misadventures in the Middle East*, Charlottesville, Virginia, 2010.

as *mujahideen* against the Soviet occupation.²⁵ They cited an alleged saying of the Prophet Mohammed that they interpreted as prohibiting the presence of non-Muslim forces in Arabia. They claimed that they had defeated the Soviet superpower (which was then indeed in the process of collapsing) and could defeat Iraqi aggression against Kuwait. Osama bin Laden became a vocal advocate of *jihad* against Iraq resembling the mujahideen's ultimately successful campaign against the USSR in Afghanistan. The king and other senior members of the royal family dismissed Osama as a fool.²⁶ They found his military analysis ludicrous and his notion of assembling the world's most militant, battle-hardened extremists on Saudi soil at least as threatening to themselves as to the Iraqis arrayed against them in Kuwait. They demanded that Osama's family rein him in.²⁷ His half-brothers tried but failed to persuade him to temper his views. His radicalization instead continued.

The bin Laden family was locally prominent and well-connected to the Al Sa`ud, much as the economically powerful "robber barons" and bankers of the "gilded age" were highly regarded and had a mutually beneficial relationship with the U.S. government. Of note, the family is neither Saudi in origin nor Wahhabi by tradition and upbringing. The bin Ladens are from the Yemeni region of Hadramawt, where the prevailing Sunni religious beliefs align with Sufism – anathema to both Salafism and its "Wahhabi" subset. Osama's mother was a secular Shi'ite (Alawite) Syrian, rather than a Saudi Sunni, or a "Wahhabi."²⁸ The Hejaz (Saudi Arabia's Western Province), where Osama bin Laden grew up, was not and is not "Wahhabi."²⁹ It is instead famous for a far less puritanical – more syncretist – version of Islam.

When Osama was 22, the Soviet invasion of Afghanistan (December 24, 1979) inspired him to join the resistance to the Soviet occupation. He helped funnel money, arms, and pan-Islamic recruits to the *mujahideen*, who were also supported by both Saudi Arabia and the United States, among others. As the Soviets retreated from Afghanistan in 1988, Osama bin Laden formalized

²⁵ Rundell, op. cit., pp. 143-144. *The Looming Tower: Al-Qaeda and the Road to 9/11*, Lawrence Wright, Vintage, 2006, pp. 178-180.

²⁶ Personal conversations with King Fahd bin `Abdulaziz and other senior members of the royal family.

²⁷ See Coll, *The Bin Ladens*, op. cit.

²⁸ See the interview with her at <https://www.theguardian.com/world/2018/aug/03/osama-bin-laden-mother-speaks-out-family-interview>. Extreme Salafis consider Alawites to be heretics worthy of death; "Wahhabis" view them as heterodox.

²⁹ Traditionally, most Hejazis adhered to the Shafi school of Islam, whereas Wahhabis are Hanbali. See Rundell, op. cit, p. 21. "Many Muslims, including the Ikhwan regarded the Hejaz as a sinkhole of iniquity and heresy."

the al Qaeda organization.³⁰ By 1992, his opposition to the presence of U.S. and other non-Muslim forces in Saudi Arabia had led to his banishment from the Kingdom. In February 1994, Osama's family disowned him. Two months later, he lost his Saudi citizenship.³¹ Repeated efforts by the bin Laden family to end Osama's opposition to the Saudi monarchy and return home continued. He repeatedly rebuffed any reconciliation with the monarchy. By 1996, Osama bin Laden was back in Afghanistan. The Saudi government attempted to persuade the Taliban, who then controlled the country, to hand him over for trial. By 1998, this effort had definitively failed.

CHARITABLE GIVING: A PILLAR OF ISLAM

Here a word on the culture of charitable donations in Muslim Arabia is in order. Charity in the form of *zakat* is one of the five pillars of Islam, mandatory for all believers and second only to prayer in religious importance. *Zakat* requires the annual donation of 2.5 percent of individual net worth above about \$315 (three hundred fifteen dollars) in value³² to the Muslim needy. *Zakat* is customarily donated to a faith-based charity.

Since 1950, in Saudi Arabia payment of *zakat* has been audited or collected by the state,³³ which – as stipulated in the Quran -- directs it to the poor, needy, *zakat* administrators, recent converts, those in bondage, the debt-ridden, holy causes, and stranded wayfarers. The anti-Soviet *jihād* in Afghanistan was a holy and a noble cause and service to Muslims that the Saudi government certified as qualified for *zakat*. The funding and other support of the anti-Soviet resistance in Afghanistan between 1979-1989 was exceedingly complex. It mingled money and weapons from many sources, including the United States, China, and others, but the major funders were the government of Saudi Arabia and pious Saudi and other Gulf Arab donors to support the noble *jihād* against unlawful occupation.³⁴

³⁰ See "Background: al Qaeda," <https://www.pbs.org/wgbh/pages/frontline/shows/network/alqaeda/indictment.html>

³¹ See text quoted in footnote #53, which makes it clear that the disowning was done at the instance of the Saudi government. Much of this history is described in detail in Coll, *The Bin Ladens*, op. cit.

³² An explanation of how *zakat* should be calculated is at <https://www.wikihow.com/Calculate-Your-Personal-Zakat#Determining-the-Threshold>

³³ Saudi government regulations are at <https://mof.gov.sa/en/Knowledgecenter/Pages/ZakahInstructions.aspx>

³⁴ Under CIA's Operation Cyclone from 1979 to 1989, the United States and Saudi Arabia provided \$40 billion worth of financial aid and weapons to almost 100,000 Mujahideen and "Afghan Arabs" from forty Muslim countries through Pakistan's ISI. See <https://www.nytimes.com/1988/04/18/world/arming-afghan-guerrillas-a-huge-effort-led-by-us.html>

Although terrorism had not yet emerged as the main subject of US-Saudi cooperation during my assignment to the Kingdom (1989 – 1992), as the U.S. ambassador, I was naturally interested in such abuses. I therefore came to know a fair amount about Saudi Arabia's establishment of and support for nongovernmental organizations engaged in Islamic charitable relief, development assistance, and religious education. The World Assembly of Muslim Youth (WAMY) is such an organization.

From its founding, WAMY has had a domestic as well as an overseas role. WAMY seeks to educate the youth about religious principles in the Quran and Sunna through religious training and practices. One of its key purposes is to keep the Saudi state and society safe from religious extremists of the sort that have periodically challenged it.

WAMY was authorized by decree to operate as a charity, which enables it to accept donations and enlist support from citizens determined to support well-being and justice for fellow Muslims abroad.³⁵ WAMY's operations include but are not limited to education and guidance. They are typically headed (as at present) by a member of the Al ash-Sheikh family. The Al ash-Sheikh are the descendants of Wahhabism's founder, Mohammed `Abd al-Wahhab. They are intermarried with the Al Sa`ud and are widely seen as the custodians of official Wahhabism. By both blood and belief, they are key defenders of the Kingdom's traditions and legitimacy.³⁶ In short, they are the monarchy's first line of ideological defense against those who, like al Qaeda, seek to discredit and overthrow it.

SUPPORT OF AL QAEDA IS ANATHEMA TO WAMY'S REASON FOR BEING

The assertion that WAMY or organizations allied with it could somehow have been in league with the individual and organization the Kingdom then identified as its most dangerous enemy appears to blend Islamophobia with profound ignorance of Saudi Arabian realities. It conflates al Qaeda – the violent opponent Al Sa`ud rule -- with Saudi establishment "Wahhabism," its reliable legitimizer. This conflation of "Wahhabism" and the institutions that advocate it with

³⁵ WAMY's charitable work abroad is exemplified by this film on its activities in Djibouti:

https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=1WMs4ahHqJI&feature=emb_title

³⁶ Rundell, op. cit, p. 102. "The most prominent members of the religious establishment remain the direct descendants of Mohammed Abd al-Wahhab, who, over the past two centuries, have produced significantly more senior scholars and judges than any other family in the kingdom. The Al al-Sheikh remain second in influence only to the Al Saud and, like the Al Saud, many receive monthly government stipends from birth."

unrelated Salafist movements is *prima face* delusional. It is like failing to recognize the distinction between Lutheranism and other forms of Protestantism, including millenarian evangelical movements and Mormonism. Any support for al Qaeda by WAMY or its leaders would be a betrayal of the organization's very *raison d'être* and regarded as treasonous collusion with terrorism. In practice, it would also place WAMY leadership at odds with the Saudi state, which would have imposed swift and serious punishment for aiding a terrorist organization like al Qaeda.³⁷

In Saudi Arabia, any ally of al Qaeda would be immediately charged with treason and, if convicted, would likely face the death penalty.³⁸ Any hypothetical diversion of funds to al Qaeda or an affiliate that came to the attention of WAMY's leadership would have been reported at once not just to the ministry of Islamic Affairs, Dawah, and Guidance but to the Ministry of Interior (which is responsible for internal security in the Kingdom). Official retribution would have been both immediate and harsh not just against the alleged perpetrators but also against those whose negligence might have facilitated their treason.

Endnote (ref. footnote 7), describing the Saudi southwestern region and the hijackers who originated there.

ⁱ The operation [*i.e.*, 9/11] was a two-pronged attack. First on the United States, but an attack equally on the House of Saud and the Saudi government. That the Saudi royal family and the Saudi intelligence services at the highest levels would be perceived by the United States to be behind the 9/11 attacks was one desired aim of the plan.

How was this deception to be accomplished?

³⁷ This included Osama bin Laden. Wright, *op. cit.*, p. 22, “. . . the Ministry of Interior ordered bin Laden's family to cut him off and it seized his share of the company – about \$7 million. As predictable as such moves were, bin Laden was taken by surprise. He depended on the monthly stipend the company paid him – in fact, it was his only real source of income.”

³⁸ See, e.g., *The War on Terrorism: How Saudi Arabia broke Al-Qaeda's back*, <https://millichrone.com/2020/04/the-war-on-terrorism-how-saudi-arabia-broke-al-qaedas-back/> and “*Al-Qaeda vow to avenge beheadings carried out by Saudi Arabia earlier this week - claiming the men were executed 'to appease America,'*” <https://www.dailymail.co.uk/news/article-6964071/Al-Qaeda-vow-avenge-beheadings-carried-Saudi-executioners.html>

That fifteen of the hijackers were Saudi citizens is not the number that is interesting. More significant is the fact that twelve of the fifteen were from the south-western mountains that had been known for centuries as Greater Yemen. This is the part of Saudi Arabia that not many westerners know about. It would include Asir, Jizan, Al-Baha, Najran. Ibn Saud sent his sons Khalid and Faisal to conquer the southwest in 1934. The Saudis pushed on down into Yemen to the Hodeida region. Their army committed atrocities in Asir. Eventually they were forced out of Yemen but held on to the southwestern mountains. A treaty was signed at the mountain resort of Taif on 14 June 1934. The southwest, Greater Yemen, had been practically self- ruling for a long time. Parts of it, such as Najran, were of a different sect than Sunni; they were Shia, of a confession called Zaydi. The customs of the southwestern people were different. Women did not wear burka or cover their face. They worked in the fields. They had the independence of the mountain folk. They found themselves under the arrogant and demeaning Nejdi rule and beset by fanatical Wahabi preachers. Everything changed, and not for the better. It was poor and has remained poor. In 2000 there was gunplay over the Saudi government's ambivalent and oft-changing tolerance of Zaydi--or Shia--religious practice. So, the region of Greater Yemen (that part of Saudi Arabia off of Route 15) was a good place to find recruits for the Struggle (Jihad).

One fanatical preacher named Sheik Ahmed Al Hawashi single-handedly encouraged five young men from Thursday Market (Khamis Mushayt) to join in a ceremony at the Sequeley mosque there in which they swore to give up everything, follow the teaching of Mohammed, and carry out jihad. One of these, Wael Aleshehri, assumed the name of one of the Companions of the Prophet, Abu Mossael al-Janubi. Al Janubi means "of the south." The Alesheris were rich and had built the mosque. The father had been a construction firm owner whose business had been for years with the father of Osama bin Laden. Wael took his brother Walid with him. The brothers would-be on-board Flight 11.

Recruits thought they were going to Chechnya, or Bosnia, even the Philippines, places where Muslims were being massacred. They did not. Instead they went to Peshawar and then over into Afghanistan. There were over one hundred bases they could have trained at in Afghanistan, but the Saudis were carefully routed down to Al Farouk Camp near Kandahar. Here they came under the control of a very high-ranking Al Qaeda operative, perhaps number three in the organization, named Mohammed Zein Abu Zubaydah. The Saudis were evaluated and intensively trained for months, in skills which included hand-to-hand combat. After a while they knew they were going to die in the coming operation.

It was easy for them to get into the United States. There were thousands of Saudis getting the expedited special visa granted by the US that made the Saudi passport the best one in Islam.

That was one good reason. Another reason is that Bin Laden had been treated harshly by the Saudi royals while he was in the Sudan. They were going to remove his citizenship. He had many reasons, the most important being of a theological basis, but he had been betrayed. He believed that they had also betrayed Islam. After all, Fahd brought the Americans into the holy land of Islam and they still have not left, even now. That Saudis chosen for the operation were from the most respected and largest tribes in Arabia. That they had volunteered against the government was what would seem like a warning to the west of a deep unrest within the Kingdom. Probably that was not true. Not until the money runs out in Yemen and Najran is taken over by the Houthis.

That the top leadership of the House of Saud could be perceived by millions of Americans as being the ones behind 9/11 would be a brilliantly perverse defamation if it could be made to work. And it looks like the idea--however counter-intuitive--might be taking off after almost two decades. The Al Qaeda 9/11 operation keeps right on going. Is there anything in history quite as remarkable as this operation? Could it still destabilize the United States somehow?

PLAINTIFFS' EXPERTS' REPORTS

It is 31 years since I began the study of Arabic and Islam and three years of service as the United States ambassador and personal representative of the president to the Kingdom of Saudi Arabia. My service (1989- 1992) coincided with the Gulf War to liberate Kuwait from Iraqi occupation and attempted annexation. This occasioned an unprecedented and since unmatched degree and intensity of interaction with the king and officers of his government and religious establishment.

No subject is more sensitive in Saudi politics than religion. A principal task of my diplomatic mission during the war was to manage potential frictions between the more than half-million U.S. troops (male and female and of many religious faiths) and Saudis, whether Wahhabis, or groups outside the Wahabis doctrine who questioned or objected to the infidel presence in the Islamic holy land, or various other schools of Islam. From August 1990 (when Iraq invaded Kuwait) through the early summer of 1992 (when most U.S. forces were withdrawn from the Kingdom), on behalf of the U.S. government and armed forces, I carried on hundreds of hours of discussion of this topic with the king, his ministers, intelligence apparatus, and officials responsible for religious affairs. This dialogue and the successful preventative political and force protection measures I helped design and implement required me to study and understand the Kingdom's religious heritages and the tensions between them as well as its history and system of governance.

My experience managing political and religious issues during the war and my continuing study of them in later years, after completing thirty years of service to my country, qualify me to evaluate statements about such issues. I had the habit, throughout my career as a representative of the United States abroad, of reading whatever I could that had been written about the history and culture of the places I was assigned. Sometimes this involved reading hundreds of books and articles. When I was unexpectedly asked to serve as U.S. ambassador to Saudi Arabia, I attempted to do the same and was shocked to discover that there was almost nothing published about it. The flood of books and articles since 9/11 has almost all reflected polemical efforts to vilify it rather than objective efforts to understand and explain it empirically.

I have reviewed the reports of Brian Jenkins, Matthew Levitt, Jonathan Winer, and Evan Kohlman. I offer below a few specific evaluations of the opinions expressed in their reports.

The Winer Report

In Section 3.7 of his report, Mr. Winer opines that the charities that helped al Qaeda engaged in two principal activities: 1) religious propagation "of an extreme form of Islam, which included dissemination and teaching of texts justifying armed conflict, violent jihad and killing non-believers..." and 2) relief efforts aimed at Muslims in need. According to Mr. Winer, the propagation activities of the charities indoctrinated and paved the way for the recruitment of Muslims to become jihadists and terrorists. He offers no specific evidence for this thesis. Mr. Winer's opinion reflects narratives prevalent in the West and Israel rather than the realities of either Islam or the Arab world, with neither of which he appears to be personally familiar.

In Section 5.3.3 of his report, Mr. Winer discusses the Ministry of Islamic Affairs' regulation of international relief agencies such as WAMY as a means of spreading "Wahhabism." In doing so, Mr. Winer adopts the opprobrious definition of "Wahhabism" espoused by the enemies of Saudi Arabia and its official religion. This usage contradicts the reality that the establishment religion in the Kingdom is a pillar of support for the very monarchy that al Qaeda is attempting to overthrow by weakening its bonds with the United States, among other actions.

In Section 6.7.2, Mr. Winer claims that former Undersecretary Levy's testimony "reflected the formal position of the entire U.S. government at the time" and "accurately describes the role that Saudi charities played in the funding of terrorist activity..." The contention that an enforcer and advocate of policy is a dispassionate analyst of phenomena relevant to the policies he advocates or that he can speak for the intelligence community's judgments about the role of Saudi charities or even for those of departments other than his own is little short of absurd. Mr. Levy was a U.S. Treasury policy official and financial sanctions enforcer. He was not and is not an analyst with direct knowledge of Saudi realities or those of the Muslim world.

The Iraq war should have taught Americans to be wary of policy pronouncements masquerading as intelligence assessments. The political appointees who advocated the Iraq war with such persuasive conviction did so out of unfounded beliefs about weapons of mass destruction and Iraqi secularist linkages to Islamist terrorism. Their views were later shown to represent

disastrously mistaken *a priori* reasoning and policy advocacy rather than analysis based on ground truth.

In Section 7.7.3, Mr. Winer quotes from the 9/11 Commission: WAMY “supported terrorist organizations, including al Qaeda, in areas where they had common goals, such as Afghanistan and Bosnia, or where their personnel had special interests...” This is an assertion without evidence to back it that fails every conceivable test of logic. Neither the Saudi government nor WAMY, have ever shared “common goals” with al Qaeda, whose openly stated objective has always been the overthrow of the Kingdom’s government and ruling family. To assert that al Qaeda acted on behalf of the Kingdom of Saudi Arabia is like claiming that the Bolsheviks sought and acted to perpetuate the power of the Russian Czar and Orthodox Church and to further their foreign policy objectives.

In Section 9.1 of his report, Mr. Winer opines “Based on the information I have reviewed, I conclude it was standard practice for charities which provided support to al Qaeda to list the support as expenses for legitimate activities, as part of helping both themselves and al Qaeda avoid detection by anyone who might seek to stop them from facilitating or carrying out terrorist activities.” This personal conclusion by Mr. Winer rests on the faulty premise that WAMY would have any reason to support al Qaeda or could have gotten away with doing so. As detailed above, it did not and could not have done so. Mr. Winer’s conclusion amounts to an unsupported allegation -- an example of a congenial deduction from a prevailing narrative, not of a finding based on either personal knowledge of the facts or unbiased understanding of them and their context.

Likewise, Mr. Winer’s opinion in section 9.4, that the ideology promulgated by major Islamic charities was in alignment with al Qaeda prior to 9/11 replaces reality with ignorant fantasy. Charities like WAMY contribute to the Kingdom of Saudi Arabia’s defense in the global Muslim *umma* against al Qaeda and other Salafi Jihadi movements, not allies of the Kingdom’s most dedicated enemies.

At Section 9.4.4.5, Mr. Winer supports his claim that WAMY’s ideology aligns with al Qaeda’s by resorting to Dr. Dore Gold: “Saudi Arabia erected a number of large global charities in the 1960s and 1970s whose original purpose may have been to spread Wahhabi Islam, but which

became penetrated by prominent individuals from al-Qaeda's global jihadi network.' He said that the three most prominent of these were IIRO, MWL, and WAMY, and also named al-Haramain."


But citing Dore Gold as an expert on Saudi Arabia, its charities, or Islam is like asking Yasser Arafat to provide an unbiased analysis of Israel, Zionist efforts to entice Jews from abroad to settle in the occupied territories of Palestine, and interpretations of the Talmud. Ambassador Gold is a representative and spokesman for the State of Israel. At the time he made the statement Mr. Winer quotes, he was a leading figure in an Israeli effort to alienate the United States from Saudi Arabia, an objective he ironically shared with al Qaeda. Now that the State of Israel has found common ground with Saudi Arabia in relation to Iran, Ambassador Gold has largely ceased to criticize the Kingdom, though, as a dedicated propagandist for Zionism, he continues to work at demonizing Islam wherever he can.

The Levitt Report

At pages 2-6 of his report, Mr. Levitt declares that, in the years leading up to 9/11, AQ relied heavily on the abuse by charities to raise, launder and move money for its terrorist purposes. He goes on to opine that "[s]ome of the most significant examples of such charities were based in Saudi Arabia and were tied to the Saudi government and its ministries and instrumentalities... The support these entities provided to al Qaeda was critical to the terrorist group's development and operational prowess." But it makes no sense to claim that Saudi-based charities such as WAMY would provide support or indoctrination to help al Qaeda. This claim is, in effect, an undifferentiated condemnation of all Islamic charities. As such, it states a common American view of Islam that verges on hate speech.

The Kohlmann Report

At page 47 of his report, Mr. Kohlmann says that "Jeddah based WAMY is another example of the shadowy Saudi dawah/charitable entities that have helped support al Qaeda over the past three decades." But it is baseless to describe an official state-created charity such as WAMY, which openly solicits funds from the public, as "shadowy." This pejorative term appears to reflect a combination of Mr. Kohlmann's own ignorance and the Islamophobia now prevalent in the United States. His suggestion that WAMY supported al Qaeda is yet another confusion of the antidote to religious extremism with the diseased form of it that al Qaeda and other Salafi Jihadi movements represent.



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Brief Reading List: The Kingdom of Saudi Arabia

Coll, Steve, "The Bin Ladens: An Arabian Family in the American Century," Penguin Press; 1st edition (April 1, 2008)

Lacey, Robert, "The Kingdom: Arabia & The House of Sa'ud," Hutchinson; 1st edition (October 1981)

Lacey, Robert, "Inside the Kingdom: Kings, Clerics, Modernists, Terrorists, and the Struggle for Saudi Arabia," Viking Adult; 1st edition (October 15, 2009)

Rundell, David, "Vision or Mirage: Saudi Arabia at a Crossroads," 1st edition, I. B. Taurus (September 17, 2020)